

The Influence of Gender on Leadership

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Abstract

The topic of leadership style based on gender differences has attracted considerable interest from both academicians and practitioners in the past few years. The link between leadership and gender has been debated and is still under scrutiny. This research aims to discuss the existing gender stereotypic expectation that “men are better leaders than women,” examining the barriers women face in their career growth and how to advance gender equality in leadership. Various aspects of gender differences in leadership styles are thoroughly discussed.

Keywords: *Leadership, Gender, Glass Ceiling, Labyrinth, Similarities, Differences.*

Introduction

Gender and leadership styles have recently piqued the interest of social scientists, management consultants, and a slew of journalists. According to their findings, men and women were found to have distinct and meaningful differences. The study has shifted the widespread belief that women are inferior to men in leadership situations to the contemporary notion that women are at par with men in leadership. Many women are in leadership roles in corporate, academic, government, political, social, and religious sectors. Virginia Marie Rometty, the CEO and President of IBM; Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University; Kiran Bedi, Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry; Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh; Social Activist Aruna Roy; and Rola Adel Sleiman, the Pastor of Christian Ministries in the Arab World are some of the examples. This increasing number clearly illustrates that the question is not “Can women lead?” but rather “Do women and men lead in different ways?” and “who is more effective as a leader among men or women?”

Eagly and Johnson mention that, in organizational studies, women were shown to be more interpersonally focused and less task-oriented than males, contrary to gender stereotypes (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). Concurrently, studies have indicated that women are still perceived as less competent for managerial roles than men. These differences were limited to the setting where social roles, such as experimental settings, were more regulated.

There is a specific incompatibility between behaviors considered more feminine, like empathy and kindness, and behaviors related to leadership. People usually link masculine characteristics such as aggressiveness, self-confidence, and dominance with leadership positions. This view can lead to distorted expectations of a female leader. There is the expectation that women must be both feminine and exhibit behaviors related to traditional leadership, which could cause bias and prejudice in the workplace. However, effective and efficient leadership requires a combination of masculine and feminine traits (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Judge et al., 2002).

According to another meta-analysis, women have a more interactive and collaborative

approach than men (Eagly and Carli, 2007). As women make their way through their careers, they search for ways to maintain authority in the least autocratic ways possible because that behavior seems more masculine.

The meta-analysis found one noticeable difference: women's leadership was more democratic or inclusive than men's leadership. (Eagly and Johnson, 1990). Another meta-analysis that looked at research from 1987 to 2000 yielded consistent findings. (van Engen and Willemsen, 2004). More study has been conducted in recent years to examine gender disparities in transformative leadership styles. Studies conducted by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen identified a slight but substantial difference between the genders in transformative leadership style. (Eagly et al., 2003). When it came to supporting and inspiring other employees, women's leadership styles were more likely to be transformative than men's. Female leaders are also engaged in recognizing and rewarding others.

Several studies have been undertaken on “leadership style and gender.” According to most respondents, there is no difference in leadership effectiveness based on gender. In the general context, both genders were equally capable leaders, but there was a gender disparity in the leadership role that they executed.

Men were considered to be more effective in the masculine role, for example, a role of a military leader (Cherry, 2020). However, women were more effective in education or social service roles.

Consequently, scientists concluded that, while men and women sometimes have different leadership styles, both genders are equally effective. The field of leadership to be exercised determines the effectiveness of leadership between men and women.

The Glass Ceiling and Labyrinth

In recent times and the past few years, we have seen the growth of women in leadership roles. Although women are no less capable than men in leadership, why is there such a significant disparity in the ratio of men to women as leaders?

Women acquire almost 57 percent of undergraduate degrees and 60 percent of graduate degrees, accounting for over half of professional degrees. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Women in the United States comprise half of the labor force and occupy more than half of managerial and professional positions. (Catalyst, 2014; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009, U. S. Census, 2007). However, the elite positions in leadership show contrary figures. Women occupy just 4 percent of Fortune 500 CEO seats (Catalyst, 2014), 16.9 percent of Fortune 500 board positions, and 14.6 percent of Fortune 500 corporate officer roles. (Catalyst, 2014). Even on the political front, there is not much of a difference. Women have only 90 of the 535 seats in the United States Congress (16.8 percent), the Senate (17 percent), the House of Representatives (16.8 percent), and women of color hold only 24 seats (Center for American Women and Politics, 2011). On a broader scale, as of 2011, the global average of women's representation in national legislatures or parliaments was 19 percent, with the United States ranked 70th out of 187 countries (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011). Furthermore, women account for only 6.1 percent of military officers at the brigadier general and rear admiral levels or higher (U.S. Department of Defense, 2008).

Helgesen and Johnson concluded that most women's professional routes resembled a spiral instead of a straight path of advancement. In this paradigm, women's professional pathways are shown as an upward spiral. (Helgesen and Johnson, 2010).

Two Wall Street Journal writers created the phrase "glass ceiling" to describe the invisible barrier that hinders women from achieving high-level leadership roles. Since then, this phrase has become part of our vernacular (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The "glass ceiling" metaphor portrays an invisible obstacle that causes hindrance to women in achieving leadership roles. Even in the case of female-dominated occupations, these barriers exist, which restrict women from ascending into elite leadership roles. On the contrary, men climb to the highest ranks by riding a "glass escalator." (Maume, 1999; Williams, 1992, 1995).

However, this metaphor is considered profoundly misleading, as we look at it more precisely in the notion of a glass ceiling. It depicts that the barriers are way up in the hierarchy. It ignores the obstacles and difficulties present during the growth process. It implies a woman would have the same career as a man. Still, as she draws closer to being an elite leader, she discovers she cannot since she is barred from attaining the position of top leadership. It is also considered misleading because a glass ceiling indicates that a woman would have a blockage only at the top of the ascending ladder. The previous achievements are considered a straight path with no obstacles. It conveys that both genders have equal opportunities to progress to a specific position level. Whereas the actual situation is that women face various types of barriers right from the initial stage of employment. The glass ceiling metaphor also indicated that the barrier is invisible and would cause a sudden surprise to women in ascending higher. The problem with this understanding is that women are considered to lack intelligence as they cannot identify the presence of the barrier even though they spend ample time in their careers.

Recently, Eagly and Carli (2007) introduced another new metaphor, representing the barriers or limitations women faced in achieving elite leadership positions in the idea of a labyrinth, which depicts the journey filled with obstacles for women to achieve top leadership positions (p. 247). The moving through the labyrinth is not smooth and uncomplicated, and it requires patience and perseverance.

The proportion of women in senior leadership differs by region:⁵

Region	Percentage of Senior Roles Held by Women
Eastern Europe	32%
Asia Pacific	28%
The European Union	28%
North America	31%
Latin America	25%

Figure 1. The region-wise proportion of women in senior leadership. (Source: Catalyst, 2019).

Unraveling of the Labyrinth

According to Northouse, P. (2015), the barriers for women in achieving elite leadership roles are generalized under three types of explanations. The first explanation comprises human capital investments, the second explanation includes gender inequalities between

men and women, and the third explanation includes prejudice and discrimination against women as leaders (p. 354).



Figure 2. Challenges women face in leadership. Source: Hoyt/Simon, 2016, p. 400).

Human Capital Differences in Leadership

The most evident reason women are underrepresented in top leadership roles compared to males is an unequal division of labor (Kark and Eagly, 2010). According to Hirshman (2006), women are de-railed by domestic responsibilities, which keep them from getting through the labyrinth (p. 15). Women receive less encouragement, illusion, and training than their male counterparts. Even though women acquire nearly 57 percent of undergraduate degrees and 60 percent of graduate degrees, women work fewer hours than men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The less involvement of women in the labor hours is because of their high participation in domestic work.

In recent years, studies have indicated that males are more active in domestic tasks and childcare than in previous years (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Nevertheless, women continue to perform most household labor (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). In the career hierarchy, women progressively drop out because one is taking responsibility for the household work and child care. According to Keith and McWilliams, women face more obstacles than men when quitting a job because women are far more likely to depart for family reasons. (Keith & McWilliams, 1999). Women are pressured to perform dual roles, be competitive at work, and manage a smooth household. This is one of the reasons for women to slow down in their career growth, while men who are their colleagues continue in their career growth. Hirshman (2006) suggests that "Women need to stay in the workforce and not stay at home." However, this suggestion is subjective for women, as many prefer to choose family over career. High cultural and societal expectations also cause women to take a sabbatical or quit their employment to focus on household work. This barrier can be tackled by equal distribution of domestic work by men and women. Northouse (2016) stated that this barrier would not be overcome without a simultaneous effort to close the gender gap at home (p. 411).

A recent survey shows an increment in the equal division of household work between men and women, which is a favorable indicator for the development of women in their careers (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Women interested in career growth must stay connected or part-time and not get lost in the domestic world (Eagly, 2016).

According to Soler Blanch and Moreno Perez (2013), companies that employ and adhere to various time management approaches benefit both employees and the firm. Organizations can retain working women more quickly if they devise flexible work arrangements and amenities that balance work and family life. These techniques would make balancing their professional and personal lives easier for both genders.

Although women hold more than half of high-skilled roles, women have fewer prospects for advancement than men. (Catalyst, 2011). One reason could be that women receive lesser encouragement and training than the opposite gender (Morrison and Von Glinow, 1990; Ohlot et al., 1994; Knoke and Ishio, 1998; Powell and Graves, 2003).

Another reason that keeps women from achieving elite positions is the psychological differences between genders. Women are more emotional than men, and they tend to use a more supportive approach than a directive approach. Women as leaders are more participative and often share the reward with others. Women as leaders generally have difficulty opposing or disagreeing with others in cases. They are less aggressive and continually invest time building positive relationships (Radu et al., 2017). According to Eagly (2016). Men leaders who are tough and ruthless are successful. However, when women are tough and strong or take on masculine behaviors, they get backlashed.

Moreover, when women are kind and soft, they are perceived as weak and considered a hindrance to rising. According to a Catalyst study (2007), forty-six percent of interviewees preferred to be perceived as competent and likable. Such perceptions put women in a fix and can deter them from advancement.

Eagly (2016) refers to this situation as a 'double bind.' According to a Catalyst study (2007), a double bind occurs when a person is compelled to pick between two equally unfavorable alternatives, and the reaction is regarded improper regardless of which option is chosen.

Goleman (1998) states that all influential leaders have high emotional intelligence (p. 93). Leadership styles are steady patterns of social interactions attached to individual leaders. The various styles are not permanent behaviors but rather a collection of behaviors with a distinct essence (Eagly, 2007). Leadership skills must change depending on the task and the environment, and this means that the leader would act accordingly during different circumstances. Eagly (2016) suggests that women negotiate their behavior by balancing between being a potentially strong leader and being kind and socially sensitive. This would help women in overcoming the hazards and rise as a leader.

Along with individual strategies, organizations also need to change their perception of women. It would be easier to get through the labyrinth when we do not think of women like alpha males (Vedantam, 2016).

Gender Differences in Leadership

The second set of explanations suggests that the leadership gap exists between genders because women are just different from men, which is one of the reasons why women's leadership styles and effectiveness differ from men. Women are underrepresented in management and seen as romantic companions rather than co-workers. As stated above by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen, research suggests men and women slightly differ

in leadership styles but are equally effective. Hence, this argument cannot be considered valid (Eagly et al., 2003).

Leadership effectiveness is primarily determined by the followers' responses to the leader. Additionally, when leading female leaders are visible, followers are often hesitant to embrace the authority and influence of someone who does not conform to the ideal of a leader (Hoyt, 2010). As a result, men are more readily recognized as leaders, while women participate in more informal positions.

Helge (2018) states that gender pay inequities and sexual harassment are some of the key reasons that cause hindrance to women in career growth. Even after being hired, women can be at a financial disadvantage, and they are usually paid less than men in comparable jobs, even in leadership roles. Women also often undergo sexual harassment at the workplace, resulting in undermined growth of women in their careers. Over half of female workers report increased sexual harassment over the years, and 53 percent have been treated with lewd remarks, postures, and humor at work. Most respondents indicated they would not and might be hesitant to continue working where sexual harassment happened (Sarkar, 2019). As a result of the challenges, women frequently lose motivation and dedication to professional growth in the workplace.

Women, according to research, are less inclined than males to posture themselves as leaders, preferring to serve as facilitators or organizers. Women who strive to position themselves as leaders are viewed as less socially acceptable and are less likely to get employed. Hence, many women who want to attain leadership positions get de-motivated and choose not to promote themselves to keep up with the social costs of ambition (Bowles and McGinn, 2005, p. 7).

Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, remarked in a TED Talk that women typically underestimate their abilities and do not negotiate for themselves in the workplace. As opposed to women, men are more willing to ask for what they seek, which is a significant difference in leadership between genders (Babcock and Laschever, 2003). Women do not ask for what they want. According to a survey conducted on people entering the job fresh out of college in 2008 and 2009, 57% of men negotiate their first compensation, whereas only 7% of women negotiate their first salary. Female MBAs commonly accept lower salary opportunities than male MBAs (Bowles et al., 2005). Bowles and McGinn (2005) also say that women often choose not to negotiate because they are aware of the social costs of ambition, and their responses are adaptive to the social disincentives (p. 7). When women negotiate for a higher salary, their managers view them as too presumptuous and demanding, who refrain from giving them the job (Bowles, 2007). Women are aware of the consequences of stepping outside of the gender bounds (Rudman and Fairchild, 2004).

Another barrier that many women have is their relationship with their bosses and mentors. Employees usually mingle with people who have similar interests. Many women cannot find a female mentor since few women are in top positions. People choose mentors of the same gender since they can better relate to the varied challenges. Women are reserved and reluctant in the workplace because of the lack of suited mentors (Laff, 2006). Male mentors are primarily hesitant to mentor women as they view them as more sensitive and emotional because of the risk of sexual harassment in the workplace (Hanson, 2008).

According to research, women are not less capable than men in leadership, but women frequently choose not to negotiate or promote themselves for the mentioned reasons above. Differences in work behavior might be found due to gender stereotypes and functions.

Prejudice in Leadership

It has been discovered that the gender leadership gap is also due to the traditional perception that “women take care and males take charge” (Hoyt and Chemers, 2008). Gender stereotypes are over-generalizations about a group's traits based on gender. Gender stereotypes also specify the appropriate features and attribute that one must possess. Stereotypes about genders are based on observing their behaviors in gender-typical social roles, and they include shared opinions about the traits of men and women from a socio-cultural perspective (Eagly, 1987).

In a meta-analysis, Eagly states that women are seen to behave more communally than men, while males are thought to behave more highly than women (Eagly, 2003). Gender stereotypes are particularly damaging to women in leadership positions since agentic, rather than communal, tendencies are typically required (Chemers and Murphy, 1995).

In recent times although the perception of leadership as a masculine role is decreasing, there is still an evident distinction that leadership is all about masculine traits (Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari, 2011). Hence, women are in a dilemma when they have to choose carefully between masculine and feminine characteristics because if they exert masculine traits, they would be considered “too manly.” If they exercise feminine qualities, they would be regarded as “unqualified” leaders. This stereotypically gendered condition that is contrary to women gives us a clear understanding of the statistical figures on why women as leaders are lacking.

A gendered biased mindset might primarily consider leadership to be a position only for males to acquire, and this bias plays a crucial role in decision making and appointing leaders (Powell and Graves, 2003). According to research, men have the abilities required for management positions, regardless of whether the attributes are masculine or feminine in other cultures (Schein, 2001). This would often result in women being unqualified or incapable of being appointed as leaders, and thus we see a big gap between genders in elite leadership roles.

Stereotypes about female leaders directly impact the perceptions and assessments of others and the women themselves. The interpretation of the abilities and characteristics of people can hugely influence the way they behave. Women who comprise a tiny minority in a male-dominated group are considered women representatives, and they undergo enormous pressure as their apparent performance is examined. They are regarded through conventional gendered perspectives (Kanter, 1977). Gender stereotypes that give the idea that women are incapable of leadership negatively impact their behavior and hinder the development of female leaders. Women respond to gender-based leadership stereotypes in two ways, i.e., either by demonstrating vulnerability by assimilating to stereotype or reacting against stereotypic behavior (Hoyt, 2010). Though women respond to gendered stereotypes in either of the ways, research states that there is a significant impact of prejudice on women over aspiration of leadership roles.

Advancing Women in Leadership

The figures show that women are successfully navigating through the leadership labyrinth in the recent past, indicating the change being brought about. There is an equal division of domestic work increasing, and it is a positive sign for women to grow as leaders (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). Cultures in organizations are changing where the work hours are getting more flexible, gendered decision-making assumptions are being challenged, and motivation is provided for women. Women can be leaders by working part-time or by working from home. Hence women who are on maternity leave or caught up with

domestic work still have an opportunity to continue with their work.

Managing Director of the Global Emergency Response Coalition, Gwen K. Young, in TEDx Talks (2018), mentioned that “flexible work arrangements are critical to overcoming barriers to leadership, particularly in countries where representation for women in leadership is lagging.” Therefore, it is vital to rethink traditional pathways that involve the way we work and what it takes to rise into a leadership position. Governments need to set up policies to enhance career development opportunities for women, and it is also necessary to provide counseling and guidance that focuses on women's career growth.

Alice Eagly says that many women know no prejudices and equal opportunities as men. They believe that this century is different from the past and do not realize that there are still barriers. Then they enter the labyrinth and see that their male colleagues progress faster. Organizations' awareness of the gender leadership gap increases, and women are provided with effective and supportive mentoring relationships to narrow the leadership gap (Ensher and Murphy, 2005). Women are to be trained and provided mentorship in creating awareness about the barriers they might face being a woman. Creating awareness could help many women caution themselves regarding the obstacles they might face in the various stages of their career and tackle the challenges forearmed. Women could be warned about the gender difference in leadership that women are quick to be judged on their feminine and masculine traits, and hence they can create a balance in their leadership without being judged.

According to research, women are twice as likely as males to end up in social-cultural ministries such as education, health, and culture. There is a change necessary for having women in every other decision-making table. Another significant issue to deal with is perception which could help in creating behavioral and policy change. The behavioral change includes how we deal or talk with boys and girls because this shapes their views about society, and we need to be more careful and cognizant in our behavior.

Secondly, behavioral change is alone not enough, and we also need to make changes in the gender blind hiring and wage policies. Hiring and promoting people must be done based on criteria and not just beliefs and gender. Hence, transparency in terms of hiring and upgrading is needed to consider some of these criteria not to be necessarily gender blind. Organizations need to adopt a transparent approach to distribute opportunities and rewards to all employees based on their abilities and quality, instead of who negotiates and who does not (Babcock et al., 2003). In a TEDx Talk, Star Jones, President of the International Association of Women, stated, “there is also a need for a change in gender inequality regarding wages because this has been an issue in many countries for every woman since they walked into the workforce” (Jones, 2018).

Debunking perceptual myths:

- 1) ***Women have to choose between work and family.*** It is a common misperception that women must choose between a career and a home life. It is disrespectful to judge women by assuming they have to choose work or family because women could choose to work and manage the family. Having children does not mean women are not available for work, and equally important to understand that women who do not have children are available for extra work (Bratby, 2018).
- 2) ***Women are too emotional.*** A woman's ability to exhibit empathy, thoughtfulness, and intuition is not a sign of weakness; it promotes a pleasant work environment and discourages emotional decision-making. Women in corporate leadership can significantly boost profitability (Noland et al., 2016).

- 3) ***Women's leadership is evaluated the same as men's leadership.*** Women are often judged on the traits that they exert and are exposed to higher criticism. Women's difference in leadership was usually attributed to their womanliness and not to their abilities as a manager. They are either labeled as "too manly" or "incapable," and women are constantly under scrutiny and talked about (Kanter, 1977).
- 4) ***Women are not interested in technology and other male-dominated industry.*** Women have earned their reputation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and are on track to have 40 percent of women in tech roles in the next five to ten years on a worldwide scale. In 2016, \$1.46 billion was invested in female-led companies. Women held 20 percent of IT jobs in 2018, 26 percent of computer jobs globally, and 5 percent of startup founders (Lynkova, 2019). These statistics show that women are interested in employment related to technology, and the numbers are expected to rise soon.

Adopting behaviors like individualized attentiveness and inspiring motivation can potentially counteract these skewed expectations. Furthermore, women's outstanding negotiation skills can assist them in obtaining the resources they require at work and at home to strengthen their leadership.

On a personal level of change, women need to understand the importance of leadership and not just see themselves as facilitators or organizers (Bowles and McGinn, 2005). It is time for women to be educated that they are not limited to facilitating but also leading. In conclusion, individuals must comprehend and educate one another about gender equality and strive for a better future for every individual who wishes to be a leader.

Conclusion

Why is it important to strive for a change? Firstly, it is crucial to remove these barriers for a better future of gender equality, where men and women get fair rights and situations to become what they desire to be. Even with all progressions in recent times, a tremendous gap exists between men and women in leadership. Today is the right time to change this gap because a wide awakening is taking place, and many communities are voicing equal rights among the sexes.

Secondly, we are getting into a serious problem by not utilizing more than half of the talent pool. The lack of women in high-level management positions comes at a cost for society. The significant disparity between women's educational attainment and professional advancement demonstrates a tremendous waste of human resources. We know by the study that women are half the talent pool, and we have evidence that shows their power. We are not utilizing the skills and knowledge of competent and skilled individuals.

By 2025, the global GDP might rise from \$12 to \$28 trillion if we employ men and women equally (Woetzel et al., 2015). This would benefit and encourage women to participate in all the decision-making tables. Imagine this situation where men are the decision-makers or influencers and make decisions on behalf of women. Surely this would not be a good sign for a better society and future. Women need to voice themselves and have equal opportunity in decision-making. Furthermore, this is important because if women are not present in defense, economic infrastructure, and services that they use, their absence in the vital decision-making tables across the globe will be evident in the results that do not meet the potential.

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